

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

September 23, 2011

The Honorable Eric H. Holder
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

The Honorable Alan Bersin
Commissioner
U.S. Customs and Border Protection
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20229

Dear Attorney General Holder and Commissioner Bersin:

I am writing to ask for your assistance in combating the spread of synthetic drugs known as “bath salts” in communities throughout Maine. The prevalence, spread, and ease of access to these substances, known as MDPV (methylenedioxypyrovalerone) and mephedrone, have led to serious health consequences in my state and have been linked to deaths across the country. I am concerned that the problem will only get worse in the state of Maine if we do not work together to develop a strategy to combat the distribution and abuse of these substances.

As the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration recently noted, the chemicals in this drug “pose a significant and growing threat to our nation” and I support DEA’s decision on September 7, 2011 to use its emergency authority to ban these chemicals for at least one year. In addition, the state of Maine enacted legislation earlier this year making it a civil offense to possess or sell any of these substances. And the efforts of local law enforcement and other community leaders in our state to combat the spread of MDPV and mephedrone have been extraordinary, despite the fact that resources are stretched thin.

Furthermore, as you may know, on July 28th the Senate Judiciary Committee unanimously approved S. 409, the Combating Dangerous Synthetic Stimulants Act of 2011. This bill would add MDPV and mephedrone to the list of controlled substances, making their possession and sale illegal in the U.S. As a cosponsor of S. 409, I believe it should be a top legislative priority for this session of Congress and I will continue to press leaders on both sides of the aisle to bring this legislation up for a vote and send it to the President at the earliest date possible.

Still, eliminating the scourge of MDPV and mephedrone and preventing dealers and traffickers from spreading it throughout small communities in Maine will require a coordinated strategy between state and local officials and the federal agencies responsible for combating these activities. We cannot afford to wait any longer while some convenience stores and online dealers continue to sell these substances, which have been found to cause effects similar to those caused by cocaine and methamphetamines. In fact, local law enforcement in Maine has reported cases in which users experienced hallucinations and violent behavior lasting more than 24 hours.

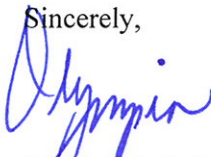
The severity of this growing problem cannot be overstated. It is vital that your respective agencies work together with other relevant entities to improve our government's strategy for partnering with local law enforcement to target the spread of MDPV and mephedrone. Specifically, based on what we are experiencing when it comes to these substances in Maine, such a targeted strategy must include the following:

- **Public awareness campaigns**, partnering with local law enforcement officials, hospitals, and schools to educate parents and young people about the dangers of abusing substances sold deceptively under names like Tranquility, Zoom, Ivory Wave, Red Dove and Vanilla Sky.
- **Coordinated policies for addressing the rampant abuse and ease of access of these substances in rural communities**, where such problems can multiply quickly while attention is placed on larger population centers. Local police departments in rural areas simply do not have all of the resources needed to fight the spread of these substances on their own.
- **Utilization of the High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTA) program**, created by Congress with the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988, to provide additional assistance to law enforcement agencies operating in areas experiencing high levels of MDPV and mephedrone trafficking.
- **Enhanced efforts by customs inspectors at the border to seize shipments of MDPV and mephedrone**, which are often manufactured in Europe and Asia and transported to the U.S.
- **Development and distribution of test kits so that local law enforcement can better identify dangerous individuals under the influence of MDPV and mephedrone in the field.** It has come to my attention that currently no such reliable testing is available to law enforcement, making their responsibility for protecting the public all the more difficult.

I ask that you update my office immediately with respect to the government's progress on the points outlined above and on the status of your efforts to combat the prevalence of these substances. Finally, making the possession and sale of MDPV and mephedrone illegal in the U.S. by adding them to the list of controlled substances is absolutely critical, and for that reason I urge the Administration to endorse our efforts to expedite the passage of the Combating Dangerous Synthetic Stimulants Act of 2011 during this session of Congress.

Thank you for your prompt response to this request. I look forward to working with you on a national strategy to combat this frightening epidemic.

Sincerely,



OLYMPIA J. SNOWE
United States Senator